

Foreword

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Foreword

For now we see through a glass, darkly
St. Paul, *Letter to the Romans*, xiii, 11.

Rather than playing with modern instruments and using techniques and interpretative skills which have developed over the last two hundred years or so, many players today search for the parameters within which music of the past can be performed in ways appropriate to the periods in which it was composed. The sources available to those making such a search include historical musical instruments and written scores as well as contemporary writings on instruments, on playing and on performance. There are also pictorial sources in which we can see for instance how musicians were grouped together for particular occasions or how specific instruments were played. But we have to take care; some of the sources may simply not be accurate or may represent some rear-guard action, an attempt to defend out-of-date fashions. Old sources may also represent special exceptions rather than the usual custom; after all, normal practice would then have been so self-evident that it required no mention. Even when the sources we have are accurate, our modern habits may prevent us from interpreting them appropriately.

The engraving reproduced on the cover of this book, *Auditus*, was made between 1766 and 1790 by Georg Balthasar Probst (1732–1801) of Augsburg. The title, given in four languages underneath, suggests that this print must belong to a series of allegories of the five senses. Indeed, not only are many musicians depicted but also a number of other persons who are obviously listening. A closer look shows that the double bass player and the 'cellist appear to hold their bows in their left hands. But the title above the engraving, *L'Ouïe*, is printed in mirror writing, telling us that this is not an ordinary engraving but one – like so many others by Probst – intended as a *vue d'optique*, a print destined for use in special optical boxes, current at the time. In them, the prints, probably lit from behind, were reflected in a mirror and viewed through a convex lens. Because of the mirror, the bass player and the 'cellist would appear reflected, that is, with their bows in their right hands, clear in the foreground. Not only that, the exaggerated perspective of the hall with its tall pillars and checker-board floor would, through the lens, give a magical impression of space. We would glimpse an allegory of sound in the late eighteenth century.

Nonetheless, looking at the print without an appropriate optical box, we see that all the violinists, grouped in two long rows, are playing correctly, that is, with their bows in their right hands. This then means that in the viewing box they would appear to be using their bows with their left hands. Perhaps Probst

neglected them because he knew they would hardly be visible: the light would have been quite dim and the quality of the mirror would not have been what we have come to expect today.

At the second meeting organised by the *harmoniques* Foundation held in Lausanne (14–19 April 2004) a number of specialists gave papers on music and performance, concentrating on instruments, this time both keyboards and brass. Some of the papers were devoted directly to the past, for instance to the instruments of the brass family in relation to the music of J. S. Bach, while others discussed the revival of the past, for instance Wanda Landowska's use of the harpsichord. Many of the essays presented in this volume – the proceedings of the conference – clarify our vision while others point out how troubled the mirror of the past may still be. Some other essays show nevertheless that there are always individuals who, though they may have an erudite knowledge of the past, transcend it by using their imaginative powers to make music alive in the present.

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